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UNCLAS JERUSALEM 001246

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA FRONT OFFICE, NEA/IPA, AND NEA/PPD
NSC FOR SHAPIRO/KUMAR
DUBAI MEDIA HUB FOR ESCROGIMA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PGOV PROP PHUM KPAL KWBG KPAO

SUBJECT: PA LIFTS SUSPENSION OF AL JAZEERA'S WEST BANK OPERATIONS

REF: JERUSALEM 1223

¶1. (U) Summary: The Palestinian Authority (PA) allowed Qatar-based satellite news channel Al Jazeera to resume operations in the West Bank on July 18. This followed the PA's suspension of Al Jazeera's license and closure of its Ramallah bureau on July 15 (reftel) on grounds of incitement and unbalanced coverage of the PA and PLO. The PA intends to proceed with its lawsuit against Al Jazeera. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) The PA reinstated Al Jazeera's license on the evening of July 18, just three days after it suspended the license and closed Al Jazeera's Ramallah bureau. An advisor to PA Prime Minister Salam Fayyad declined to explain the reason for reinstating the license. The PA had fallen under heavy pressure to do so, including from some individual PA officials, such as the newly-designated director of the PA Information Office, Ghassan al Khatib.

¶3. (SBU) The PA will proceed with a lawsuit against Al Jazeera on charges of incitement and reporting false information. It plans to file the suit either in the West Bank or Qatar. An official of Al Jazeera's Ramallah bureau told PD staff that the network has not been officially notified of the lawsuit and is "not concerned," stating that the suit has no legal merit and is politically motivated.

¶4. (SBU) An official of Al Jazeera's Ramallah bureau complained that the three-day ban had "paralyzed" the news channel's operations in the West Bank. Al Jazeera was not able to cover a large event attended by the Consul General in Nablus on July 18, for example, he said.

¶5. (SBU) The Al Jazeera Ramallah bureau official told PD staff that the decision to suspend Al Jazeera's operations in the West Bank is part of an ongoing campaign of "harassment" by PA officials, among them senior aides to President Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen). He expressed hope that the PA would treat Al Jazeera like other media outlets and refrain from making "arbitrary and irresponsible" decisions against the news channel in the future. He predicted that, given the strong support that Al Jazeera received from local and international civil society organizations, the PA would think twice before making further decisions that, he claimed, clearly violate freedom of the press.

WALLES